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SUBJECT: GUIDANCE: MIDDLE EAST BRIEFING, MAY 28

¶1. (U) This is an action message. USUN is authorized to draw from the points in para 2 below during the Middle East Briefing, currently scheduled for May 28.

¶2. (U) Begin points:

-- Mr. President, over the last two months, the United States has been increasingly dismayed about the unproductive and divisive tone of these briefings. Mutual recriminations and hostile interventions do not reflect well on the UN Security Council given the seriousness of this subject. More importantly, the Israeli and Palestinian people deserve better from this Council. I hope that today's discussion can demonstrate the Council's ability to deal in a fair and balanced way with this issue. With that in mind, I would like to make the following four points today with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and then turn to the situation in Lebanon.

-- First, achieving a peaceful, two-state solution continues to be a top priority for the United States. The United States remains committed to a peace agreement before the end of the year. President Bush's recent trip to the region reflected his continuing personal engagement and commitment to this issue. Secretary Rice continues to travel to the region on a monthly basis. There is a solid negotiating structure in place and talks are moving forward. We believe these are the most serious talks the parties have had for some time, touching on all of the core issues. The talks are, as one would expect, difficult, and due to the private nature of the dialogue, progress may not be visible, but that should not be mistaken for a lack of progress.

-- Second, we understand the importance of achieving progress on the ground in the form of improved economic and humanitarian conditions for Palestinians and improved security for Israelis. We are working hard to support the parties' efforts in this area, both through the efforts of General Fraser, who continues to work with the parties to monitor and promote implementation of the Roadmap, and through the efforts of General Dayton. Dayton's program is in full swing, helping to train and reform the PA Security Forces. We are looking forward to the Berlin Conference on Palestinian Civil Security on June 24, which we expect to expand international efforts in this crucial area. Secretary Rice is also deeply involved in this part of the process. She has held several trilateral meetings with Prime Minister Fayyad and Minister of Defense Barak. These meetings have begun to yield tangible results that can improve conditions on the ground. Likewise, the PA security forces have deployed to Jenin in coordination with Israeli authorities and are working to uphold law and order and crack down on terrorism.

-- Third, Palestinian capacity building also remains a

central issue, key to the success of this process. The Ad Hoc Liaison Committee met in London on May 2 to maintain donor coordination and to seek to expand donor support for the PA. The PA remains in dire straits financially, facing a projected budget deficit of over \$500 million in 2008. The U.S. is making every effort to channel assistance to the PA and we have already delivered on over \$218 million of our \$555 million pledge in Paris last December. We would urge others to do all that they can to support the PA.

-- Fourth, we congratulate the Palestinians on the success of the Bethlehem Private Investment Conference held in Bethlehem May 21-23. The conference showcased the potential for private sector investment there and resulted in the conclusion of significant investment agreements on the margins of the event. We also commend all of those states and companies that attended and contributed to the success of this event, as well as the Government of Israel which took all possible steps to ensure the event's success.

-- We will continue to work to advance each of these tracks, and to coordinate with our partners in the international community, principally through the Quartet which last met in London on May 2, and which continues to play an important role supporting the parties' efforts and coordinating international engagement on this extremely important issue.

-- We understand that Israel and Syria have agreed to conduct indirect peace talks under the auspices of Turkey and that the parties have declared an intention to proceed in good faith and with open minds with a view to achieving a peace agreement. It is our hope that discussions between Israel and Syria will cover all the relevant issues, including the Syrian Government's support for terrorist groups, facilitation of the passage of foreign fighters into Iraq, and intervention in Lebanon, as well as repression inside Syria.

-- (if needed) Regarding the situation in Gaza, we remain committed to a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, and we will never abandon the people of Gaza. We have encouraged Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Egypt to work together to formulate a new approach that will provide security to all three parties, empower the Palestinian Authority, ensure the humanitarian needs of Gazans are being met, and work towards conditions that will permit implementation of the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access. The United States condemns the ongoing effort by Hamas to usurp violently the lawful authority of the Palestinian government. A Palestinian state will never be born through terror but rather through the commitment of responsible Palestinian leaders. The international community must support the efforts of responsible Palestinian leaders, like President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad, who are working to build a better life and a future of peace for the Palestinian people. Hamas can be part of that peaceful process by accepting the principles outlined by the Quartet: renunciation of violence and terror, recognition of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements between the parties, including the Roadmap.

-- Turning to Lebanon, the United States was deeply concerned by the Hizballah-initiated violence of the last few weeks. The Lebanese people deserve an independent and secure country where they are free to make decisions and participate in the political process without fear of violence or intimidation. The use of force to implement a political agenda is unacceptable. Hizballah has clearly shown its wanton disregard for the well-being of the Lebanese people as well as the previous resolutions of this Council.

-- The United States welcomes the election of Michel Sleiman as president of Lebanon, which was made possible by the

agreement reached by Lebanese leaders in Doha, Qatar. We view this agreement as a positive step towards resolving the current crisis by electing a President, forming a new government, and addressing Lebanon's electoral law, consistent with the Arab League initiative. I commend those Lebanese leaders, supported by the Arab League, who refused to meet violence with violence. The international community must stand with Lebanon's legitimate government in rejecting the use of violence to achieve political ends in Lebanon, and insisting upon the authority of the state and the illegitimacy of militias such as Hizballah that seek to undermine that authority in defiance of this Council.

-- The United States will continue to support the legitimate authorities in Lebanon, including the government and its security establishment and its complete authority over all of Lebanese territory. We call on all Lebanese leaders to implement this agreement in its entirety, in accordance with the Arab League initiative and in conformity with UN Security Council resolutions 1559, 1680, 1701, and 1757, and to address the root causes of this ongoing conflict.

End points.

RICE